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SUBJECT: MEPI UPDATE FOR MOROCCO

REF: A) 07 Rabat 1724

11. Summary: This cable highlights MEPI programs and initiatives in Morocco from October 1-December 30. During the quarter, two representatives from MEPI's Washington offices visited Morocco. Highlights from existing programs include activities by the Advancing Learning and Employability for a Better Future (ALEF) literacy project, the MEPI Alumni Network, the American Bar Association (ABA), the Moroccan Center for for Civic Education (MCCE), the Adala Association and the Financial Services Volunteer Corps (FSVC). Implementers are partnering with local NGOs at the grassroots level to support numerous programs committed to reform in the four MEPI pillars. End Summary.

12. MEPI's North Africa Desk Officer, Saira Saeed, visited Morocco December 12-15. In Casablanca, she met with education grant implementer Arab Civitas; a small grant recipient working on youth and election issues, 2AJ; and Consulate personnel. In Rabat, Saeed held meetings with the Ambassador, the DCM, members of post's Reform Committee, and USAID. In addition, she met with MEPI implementers National Democratic Institute (NDI), ABA, Tanmia and FSVC, and members of the MEPI Alumni Network. She also joined the IREX team -- Matt Shelley, MENA Media Director, Hania Oweis, IREX Deputy Director, and Christine Prince, Senior Program Officer -- for several of their meetings with embassy officers, representatives of the Moroccan media, members of the advertising sector and civil liberties proponents. The IREX team's goal was to evaluate the existing MENA Media program and to develop a new strategy for media programming in Morocco.

13. Kit Bartels from MEPI Washington traveled to Rabat November 12-15 on a familiarization visit and to conduct monitoring work. She met with ABA to discuss future programs including a potential court clerks training course. She also attended the introduction of ABA's training program for judges. Bartels met with the MEPI Alumni Network and Demos Consulting to get an update on their activities. She also met with Global Rights to discuss its activities, though the NGO does not currently have MEPI funding. Global Rights' Director, Stephanie Bordat told Bartels that it was unfortunate that MEPI funds for women's related issues have decreased, because with the passing of the Family Code there is increased need for programs to ensure full implementation of the code. Bartels met with Taly Lind from USAID, who emphasized USAID's hope for additional funds for the national role-out of the literacy curriculum of the recently completed ALEF program. Finally, Bartels discussed with Emboffs ways to improve coordination efforts in MEPI programs.

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ALEF LITERACY  
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14. ALEF has been selected by the Casablanca regional chapter of the National Initiative for Human Development (INDH), an influential GOM program, to teach 24,000 Moroccan women how to read and write. The Casablanca Regional Academy for Education and Training will use the MEPI-funded ALEF literacy program criteria, developed and tested with the Directorate for the Fight Against Illiteracy between 2005 and 2007 with 10,100 women in four of Morocco's 16 regions. This innovative program, designed with the State Secretariat for Literacy and Non-formal Education and 28 local civil society organizations, is based on a pre-literacy approach that trains women first in the basic competencies of reading and writing the Arabic alphabet using their native Arabic and Berber dialects. The program derives its content from Morocco's Family Code, focusing on a functional approach to help women use the Code to improve their lives and those of their families. The Casablanca region selected the ALEF program in particular because it has achieved attendance and retention rates of over 90 percent during the pilot phase, compared to Morocco's national average of approximately 70 percent.

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MEPI ALUMNI NETWORK ACTIVITIES  
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15. Throughout the quarter, the MEPI Alumni Network organized numerous activities targeting the differing needs of MEPI Alumni. In November the network organized a conference entitled "Leadership Fminin au Maroc" (Women's Leadership in Morocco) that brought together three influential Moroccan women leaders working in three different fields (politics, entrepreneurship and social development): Boutaina Iraqui-Houssaini, who is a MEPI Alumni and also a recent member of the parliament; Aicha Echenna, a renowned figure in Morocco who defends single mothers; and Rachida Tahiri, who is a women's rights activist and currently a Counselor to

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Minister of Social Development, Family and Solidarity Nouzha Skalli. The conference was attended by 130 participants representing different MEPI Alumni groups. The network also organized a series of workshops to enhance the professional and personal development skills of the MEPI Alumni. These workshops had 15 to 20 alumni and focused on the skills they acquired during their initial participation in MEPI programs.

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ABA ACTIVITIES  
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16. During this reporting period, the Institut Supérieure de la Magistrature (ISM), with the assistance of the ABA, finalized a series of new computer-based training courses for student and sitting judges on the Family Code and international standards of women's equality. The courses, which will be available to judges throughout Morocco via the ISM's website, are at the cutting edge of efforts in the region to provide uniform and systematic training to judges. The series of eight training modules is being integrated into the ISM's core training program and is expected to lead the way to further computer-assisted judicial training in the future, both in Morocco and elsewhere in the region.

17. Morocco is on the path to adopting a new charter of judicial conduct in 2008 and at the same time developing a more effective judges' association. The Widadiya Hassania, the nascent Moroccan judicial association, initiated a series of national roundtables in December to seek judges' views on the adoption of a national judicial ethics charter. With technical assistance from the ABA, the Hassania expects to seek adoption of a national ethics charter at the conclusion of the series of roundtables, first held in the northern city of Tetouan last spring and recently held in Oujda, east of Morocco. At the same time as spearheading the drive for an ethics charter, the Hassania is strengthening its institutional capacity as an active judge's membership organization. In November, the executive board of the Hassania met with an institutional strengthening expert to develop an ambitious organizational strategic plan, which is expected to lead to a more active and responsive judges' association for Morocco.

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MCCE PROJECTS  
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¶18. During the quarter, MCCE activities included a Project Citizen workshop for 107 new administrative staff members assigned by the Academy for Education and Training to various schools in Casablanca. A second Project Citizen training event was organized for 20 NGOs operating throughout Morocco and it successfully attracted significant media coverage on both radio and TV.

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ELECTIONS 2007  
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¶19. Abdelaziz Nouaydi, head of former MEPI grantee Adala, was one of the featured speakers at an NDI and the Consultative Council for Human Rights (CCDH) conference to report on the recent election observation efforts in Morocco. Nouaydi recently gained notoriety as the only Moroccan lawyer to publicly agree to defend a group of men accused of conducting a homosexual wedding in November. Nouaydi accepted the case despite threats of violence and possible adverse professional consequences.

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FSVC PROJECTS  
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¶10. In November, FSVC organized a four-day study tour to South Africa for BMCE Bank (Banque Marocaine pour le Commerce Exterieur) Senior Management studying on-site innovations in low-income financial product development. Host institutions, which included NedBank, African Bank Investment Limited, FinMark Trust, Africap Fund and Wizzit Telephone Banking discussed and presented hands-on operational issues for the BMCE management team, which included the Executive Managing Director, Mohamed Bennani, a member of the Board of BMCE. As a result of this study, and a prior study tour in May 2007 with other banks, BMCE intends to introduce "within the year" a new range of financial products and services for Morocco's extensive low-income and informal sectors.

¶11. From December 3-7, FSVC organized a workshop for Groupe Banques Populaires (BP) regional bank credit officers on the best banking

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practices and techniques of small-to-medium size enterprises (SME) lending. The workshop focused on comparative approaches to SME loan application evaluation, and solutions to loan disbursement and monitoring. Also in December, FSVC held two consultations with Morocco's Central Bank, Bank Al Maghrib (BAM) on supporting key reforms at BAM. The first, December 10-14, reviewed payment systems oversight plans that confirmed BAM's best practice approach and added insights on better use of system user contracts to achieve financial stability and supervision objectives. The second, December 17-20, reviewed BAM's total business continuity planning as a service to the financial sector. The results confirmed the benefits of a best practice approach and the substantial reforms that MEPI has supported at BAM since 2004.

¶12. A detailed description of MEPI programs in Morocco can be found on the Mission unclassified Internet web page at [www.usembassy.ma](http://www.usembassy.ma).

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